Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

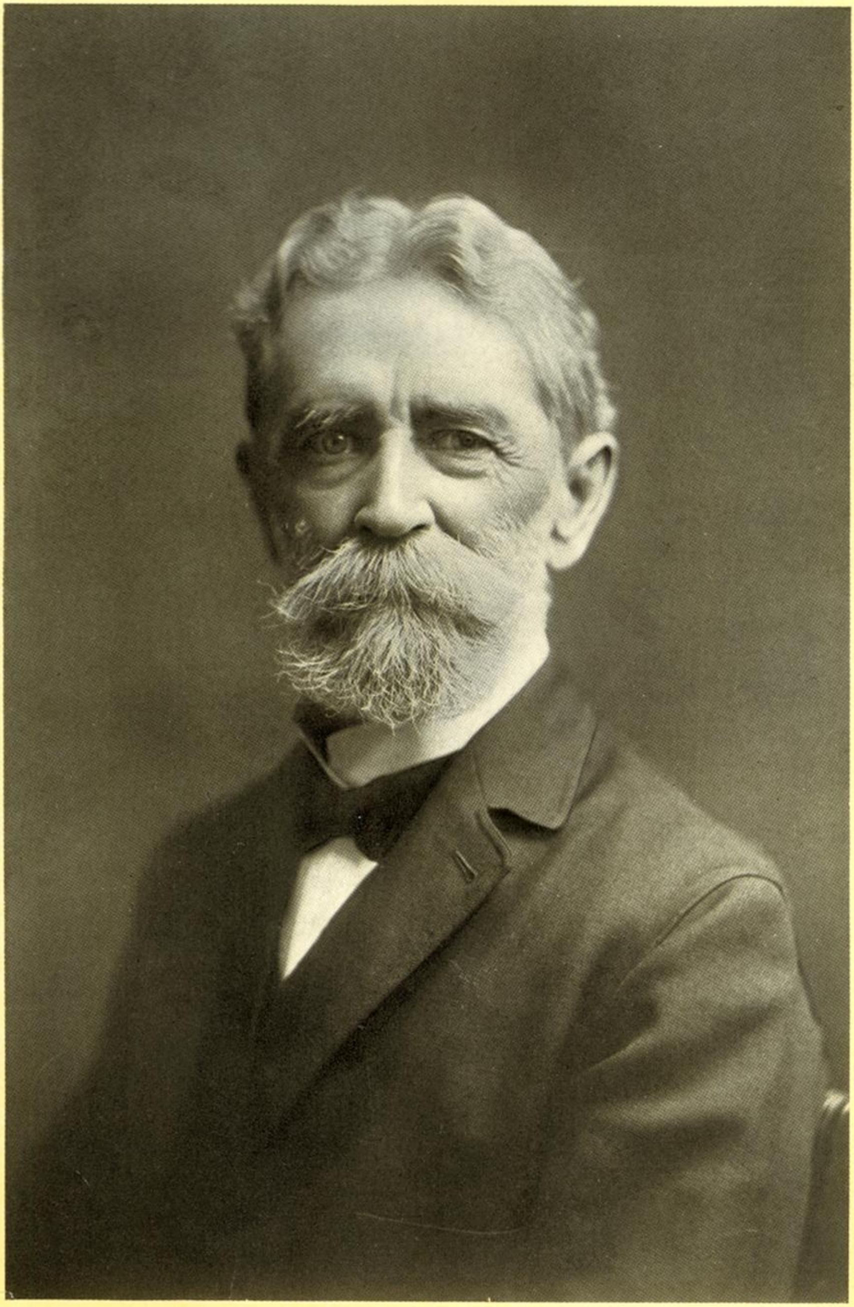
JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Otis Tufton Mason

The span of Otis Tufton Mason's life, which began in Eastport, Maine, on April 10, 1838, and closed on November 5, 1908, in Washington City, covered most of the period characterized by the enormous advances of industrial arts and of science that marked the nineteenth century. During the later years of his life he expressed great satisfaction that he had been privileged to witness the modern miracles of the world's progress, and voiced a regret that he could not live to see what was yet to be.

The story of how the boy, with few advantages, became articulated with the world movements in science, begins in the business reverses of his father, which determined the migration of the family to the southward. While yet an infant, this removal brought him to Philadelphia and shortly thereafter to Haddonfield, New Jersey, where the youth, under excellent teachers and in the best of family surroundings, laid the foundation for future activities. The family moved to Woodlawn, Virginia, in 1849, and was joined by Otis in 1851. He has often said that "this was the opening of the gates of circumstance," for in 1856 he became a student in Columbian (now George Washington) University, and had chosen that path of life which he followed persistently afterward. He graduated from Columbian College in 1861. In the next year he became principal of the preparatory school, where he taught until 1884. That Professor Mason was an ideal teacher is attested by a myriad of witnesses, who join in unstinted praise of his tact, gentleness, and helpfulness, and are thankful for their association with him.

With a mind trained like the muscles of an athlete, Mason soon reached out for materials pertaining to the study he had chosen under the guidance of President Samson of Columbian College — the culture-history of the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean. The Smithsonian Institution, then entering its third decade, attracted him, and guided by the practical wisdom of Joseph Henry, he abandoned his Oriental studies and took up that of the peoples



O. T. Mason

1838-1908

of America. This he regarded as a crucial event in his life, and in 1872 we find him connected in his work with the Institution as collaborator in ethnology. For twelve years he gave every spare moment, aside from teaching, to the collections which had gathered in the Institution, assembling and arranging them in the new hall of the Smithsonian and preparing a catalogue. His next steps were to edit the scheme of Gustav Klemm in *Kulturgeschichte*, or the study of history as written in human handiwork (1874); to prepare a pamphlet for the guidance of archeologists in their explorations, and also a guide-book for ethnologists. From these organized and systematic beginnings have grown the present greatly improved exhibits of the National Museum. It was apparent that Mason had now found his real life-work. In 1884 he laid aside teaching and became curator of the department of ethnology in the National Museum, where for almost a quarter of a century he labored with abundant result. The Museum which had been for years the dream of Baird became an actuality in 1881, when its new building was completed, and the great collections piled in confusion in its halls began to fall into order under the constructive minds of Goode and Mason. The first years of Mason's intendency were devoted to the classification of this material, in setting forth the scope of ethnology, and in publishing the results of his studies. Among the twenty writings, mostly notes consisting of a single page, which he published in 1884, were two of a form new to scientific literature — "Throwing Sticks in the National Museum" and "Basketwork of the North American Aborigines" — and which mark an epoch in the history of ethnology. The idea which Professor Mason had in mind was that each invention takes on tribal modifications, the sum of which is the range of variation; and these, over and above the environmental causes of variation, may give clew to the origin of the invention and will reconstruct an interesting chapter of human thought. The order of arrangement for study was geocultural, and the descriptions according to natural history methods; the specimens thus accurately worked up became types. These papers evidently grew out of the plan adopted by Professor Mason in arranging the material under his charge. The writer often heard his injunction to "put like with like, and tribes and localities will take care of themselves."

The monographs cited were the forerunners of a series appearing at frequent intervals, the last, a "Vocabulary of Malaysian Basketwork," based on the W. L. Abbott collections, issuing from the press on the day of his funeral. They are of the greatest value to students, and being based on unalterable scientific description can never be superseded. The immediate and wide recognition of these works was due to the fact that they conveyed a message in an intelligible, even a literary, form. The ardent desire to say the last word on the specimens under study led him to so thoroughly examine their structure and function that he was as familiar with them as were their original makers, and this proficiency he exacted of himself before he published his results. His skill in the dissection of aboriginal handiwork, especially in the textile art, was marvelous, and the mastery of intricate detail seemed to have a fascination for him, bringing out his unusual powers as a mathematician.

Realizing, after the first enthusiasm, that a museum cannot be arranged entirely on the order of the development of inventions, Professor Mason adopted the idea of the ethnic unit, and arranged the excellent Aino collection as an example. In one exhibition case he epitomized the social and material culture of this people, and from this beginning has sprung the more elaborate type of this arrangement in the National Museum.

Professor Mason was an expert in classification. He delighted in the problems involved in the schematic arrangement of the contents of the logos, and nothing was too difficult for his active mind, which grasped and marshaled multifarious relations with the suavity of a master. The writer's first years with him, aside from routine work with the collections, were spent in collating the classifications that had been put forward as ordinating the contents of anthropology, and especially those relating to classification of the races of man, which appeared in three large wall charts. His brochure entitled "What is Anthropology?" is a model of lucidity that formed the basis of the working plan of the Anthropological Society of Washington, and with slight modification its scheme remains the basic structure of the Society to-day.

As early as 1873, Professor Mason began the preparation of a list of the tribal names mentioned in the literature on the Indians, and by 1879, when the Bureau of Ethnology was organized, had recorded several thousand names, with references to the works in which they are found. From this list, the "Handbook of American Indians," now in process of publication by the Bureau, had its inception, and to the publication in its fuller form he contributed articles on the arts and industries of the American tribes. Mason's relations with the Bureau were intimate for many years, and to him is due, not only during its formative period but throughout its history, a commendable share in its success.

Professor Mason's collection of tribal names was enlarged constantly, the results, embracing the whole world, remaining in the National Museum as a monument to his indefatigable zeal.

In February, 1879, there appeared in the Washington press a call for the formation of an Archeological Society in Washington, signed by J. M. Toner, M.D.; Otis T. Mason, Columbian College; and Garrick Mallery, U. S. A. On the 10th of the month there assembled in the Regent's room of the Smithsonian Institution a number of persons who were willing to join in the enterprise. Professor Mason advocated the widening of the scope of the society, and proposed the name Anthropological instead. It was he who wrote the constitution under which the Anthropological Society of Washington was organized, and he remained deeply interested in it until the close of his life, contributing largely to its program and to its organ, *The American Anthropologist.*

For eighteen years Professor Mason was a member of the United States Board on Geographic Names. Until the time of his death he greatly enjoyed the work of this body, which found so useful the knowledge he commanded on the nomenclature of the American Indians.

Professor Mason was a man of wide perspective and catholicity. His early education was begun at a period when the culture side of study was its chief charm and utility; classical studies preponderated, and he fell under the sway of the literary spirit of the period. This was apparent in his activities in Washington from the early years of his novitiate when he entered into the work of the literary societies, reading papers upon subjects which were of general interest. This feature of imparting instruction was continued as long as his physical powers permitted. He was also a pleasing public speaker, and everyone felt attracted toward him. He was a friendly man, thoughtful and kind, and so enthusiastic about his science that he compelled a like interest in everyone with whom he came in contact, likewise planting the germ of the desire to study anthropology into the minds of hundreds whom he never saw. Besides this, the stimulation of his work was felt by individuals and institutions wherever the current of thought flowed. He never forgot in anthropology that he was himself a man — he was a happy instance of an individual who could take his human interests into his work.

The alacrity with which Professor Mason attacked the problems around him was an inspiration to those who knew him; he well recognized the vastness of science, yet, rather than being appalled, with gladness of heart he reaped in its fields. He had attained the enviable stage where his work had become play, his meat and drink, and the absorption of his waking moments, and even in the night he often awoke to jot down a thought upon the tablet that always hung at his bedside. This happy combination of mental alertness, capacity for hard work, and humor, conspired to make him an exceptional man, and those who were associated with him ever felt his elevating influence.

It has been remarked that Professor Mason's chief characteristic was his optimism. Few men have been called to endure more severe trials — he saw his family fade away until but one remained, and through all the anxieties that would have overwhelmed a lesser man, he bore a most equable demeanor, and none heard him complain. The secret of this optimism was not at all grounded in fatalism, but rather lay in the deeper philosophy of education with which he was imbued, that saw in every contact with life, whether it brought pain or pleasure, something that schooled the individual and molded his character.

It is somewhat difficult, at this time, to fully appraise the value of Professor Mason's scientific work. But those who knew the care which he took to insure the accuracy of his observations do not doubt that the results of his labors will have a permanent place beside those who have been foremost in promoting the science of Anthropology; and many of his writings will be utilized by future generations as text-books in this science.

A selected list of Professor Mason's writings follows :

The Leipsic Museum of Ethnology. *Smithsonian Report 1873*, 390–410.

Ethnological directions relative to the Indian tribes of the United States. Prepared under the direction of the Office of Indian Affairs. Washington, 1875. 32 pp. (This pamphlet is based on Gustav Klemm's classification of Ethnology and formed the guide for collectors for the Centennial Exposition of 1876.)

The Latimer collection of antiquities from Porto Rico in the United States National Museum, at Washington, D. C. *Smithsonian Report 1876*, 372–393, 60 figs.

A comparison of a written language with one that is spoken only. *Bull. Philos. Soc. Wash.*, 1879, III, 139–140.

What is Anthropology? A Saturday Lecture delivered in the U. S. National Museum, March, 1882. 21 pp.

The scope and value of anthropological studies. *Proc. A. A. A. S.*, 1884, 365–383.

The relation of the mound builders to the historic Indians. *Science*, 1884, III, 658–659.

Basket-work of the North American aborigines. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1884*, 291–306, 64 pl.

Throwing-sticks in the National Museum, *Ibid.*, 279–289, 17 pl.

Indians in the United States, June 30, 1886. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1885*, 902–907.

Resemblances in arts widely separated. *Amer. Naturalist*, 1886, XX, 246–251.

The Ray collection from Hupa reservation. *Smithsonian Report 1886*, 205–238, 118 figs., 26 pl.

The human beast of burden. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1887*, 237–295, 54 figs.

Cradles of the American aborigines. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1887*, 161–212, 45 figs.

The educational aspect of the United States National Museum. *Johns Hopkins Univ. Studies in Hist. and Polit. Sci.*, 1890, VIII, no. 4, 504–519.

The natural history of folk-lore. *Jour. Amer. Fore-lore*, 1891, IV, 97–105.

Aboriginal skin-dressing. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1889*, 553–589, 33 pl.

The ulu, or woman's knife, of the Eskimo. *Ibid.*, 1890, 411–416, 21 pl.

The land problem. Lectures before the Brooklyn Ethical Association. N. Y., D. Appleton & Co., 1892; pp. 111–130, 12 maps.

The birth of invention. *Proceedings and Addresses, Celebration of the Beginning of the Second Century of the American Patent Systems*, Washington, 1891, pp. 403–412; also *Smithsonian Rep. 1892*, 603–611.

Technogeography, or the relations of the earth to the industries of mankind. *Am. Anthropologist*, 1894, VII, 137–161.

North American bows, arrows, and quivers. *Smithsonian Rep. 1893*, 631–679, 58 pl., many figs.

Woman's share in primitive culture. N. Y., D. Appleton & Co., 1894, 295 pp., 60 figs.

Aboriginal American mechanics. *Mem. Internat. Congress of Anthropology*, Chicago, 1894, 69–83.

Historic and ethnologic science. *The Epoch*, Washington, 1895, I, 3–11.

The origin of inventions : Study of industry among primitive people. London, Walter Scott, 1895, 419 pages, 76 figs.

Influence of environment upon human industries or arts. *Smithsonian Rep. 1895*, 636–666, 1 pl., 2 figs.

Migration and the food quest : A study in the peopling of America. *Smithsonian Rep. 1894*, 523–539, map.

Primitive travel and transportation. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1894*, 237–593, 25 pl., 260 figs.

Aboriginal American zoötechny. *Am. Anthropologist*, 1899, n. s., I, 45–81, 1 fig., 4 pl.

The man's knife among the North American Indians. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1897*, 727–745, 17 figs.

Ethnology and archæology of Mexico. In *Mexico : A geographical sketch*, compiled by the Bureau of American Republics, 1900, 23–46.

Traps of the Amerinds : A study in psychology and invention. *Amer. Anthropologist*, 1900, n. s., II, 657–675.

Aboriginal American harpoons : A study in ethnic distribution and invention. *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1900*, 189–304, 20 pl., 92 figs.

Aboriginal American basketry : Studies in a textile art without machinery (with bibliography). *Rep. U. S. Nat. Mus. 1902*, 171–548, 248 pl., 212 figs. (Reprinted by Doubleday, Page, and Co., N. Y., in two volumes.)

The ripening of thoughts in common : Common sense is thoughts in common. *Proc. Am. Philos. Society*, 1904, XLVIII, no. 176, 148–155.

Mind and matter in culture. *Am. Anthropologist*, 1908, n. s., X, 187–196.

Vocabulary of Malaysian basketwork : A study in the W. L. Abbott collections. *Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, XXXV, 1–51, pl. i–xvii, figs. 1–41, Nov. 7, 1908.

U. S. NATIONAL MUSEUM,
WASHINGTON.

WALTER HOUGH.